

Oath of Allegiance (United States)

The **United States Oath of Allegiance** (officially referred to as the "Oath of Allegiance," 8 C.F.R. Part 337 (2008)) is an oath that must be taken by all immigrants who wish to become United States citizens. The first officially recorded Oaths of Allegiance were made on May 30, 1778 at Valley Forge, during the Revolutionary War.

The current oath is as follows:

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.^[1]

In some cases, the USCIS allows the oath to be taken without the clauses regarding the bearing of arms and performance of noncombatant military service.^[2]

8 C.F.R. 337.1^[3] provides that the phrase "so help me God" is optional and that the words 'on oath' can be substituted with 'and solemnly affirm'. Also, if the prospective citizen can prove such commitments are in violation with his or her religion, the lines "that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by law; that I will perform non-combatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by law" are sometimes omitted.

The current exact text of the Oath of Citizenship is established only in the form of an administrative regulation promulgated by the executive branch. However, under the Administrative Procedure Act, USCIS could theoretically change the text of the oath at any time, so long as the new text reasonably meets the "five principles" mandated by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1953. These principles are:

- allegiance to the United States Constitution,
- renunciation of allegiance to any foreign country to which the immigrant has had previous allegiances
- defense of the Constitution against enemies "foreign and domestic"
- promise to serve in the United States Armed Forces when required by law (either combat or non-combat)
- promise to perform civilian duties of "national importance" when required by law

There has been some controversy about the wording of the oath, parts of which are based on the British Oath of Supremacy which was written in the 16th Century. As a result, some have suggested much of the language is antiquated and confusing. In the fall of 2003 the United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services planned to change the oath of citizenship in time for Citizenship Day (September 17). The proposed oath was as followed:

Solemnly, freely, and without mental reservation, I hereby renounce under oath all allegiance to any foreign state. My fidelity and allegiance from this day forward is to the United States of America. I pledge to support, honor, and be loyal to the United States, its Constitution, and its laws. Where and if lawfully required, I further commit myself to defend the Constitution and laws of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, either by military, noncombatant, or civilian service. This I do solemnly swear, so help me God.^[4]

The introduction of the new oath was scrapped by the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security, and Claims on April 1, 2004.^[5]

References

- [1] *Oath of Allegiance for Naturalized Citizens* (<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=facd6db8d7e37210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD&vgnextchannel=dd7ffe9dd4aa3210VgnVCM100000b92ca60aRCRD>), Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, , retrieved 2010-06-30
- [2] Judges Bring History to Naturalization Ceremonies (http://www.uscourts.gov/News/TheThirdBranch/08-05-01/Judges_Bring_History_to_Naturalization_Ceremonies.aspx), May 2008 issue of The Third Branch (<http://www.uscourts.gov/ttb/>), The Newsletter of the Federal Courts.
- [3] <http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/get-cfr.cgi?TYPE=TEXT&YEAR=current&TITLE=8&PART=337&SECTION=1>
- [4] John J. Miller (September 15, 2003), *Oath on Ice* (<http://www.nationalreview.com/miller/miller091503.asp>), National Review Online, , retrieved 2008-11-07
- [5] *Preserve Oath of Citizenship* (<http://www.legion.org/pressrelease/2164/preserve-oath-citizenship>), the American Legion, April 1, 2004,

Article Sources and Contributors

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